IMPRIMATUR hic Liber (cui Titulus, *A Letter to a DEIST.*).

Feb. 8. 1676.

Guil. Jane, R. P. D. Henr. Epiſc. Lond. *a Sacris Domeſt.*

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A

LETTER

TO A

DEIST,

In Answer to several

OBJECTIONS

AGAINST THE

TRUTH and *AUTHORITY*

OF THE

Scriptures.

By Bp Stillingfleet

LONDON,

Printed by *W. G.* and are to be sold by *M. Pitt*, at the *Angel* in St. *Paul's* Church-Yard, 1677.

THE PREFACE.

THis following Diſcourſe was Written for the ſatisfaction of a particular Perſon, who owned the Being and Providence of God, but expreſſed a mean Eſteem of the Scriptures, and the Chriſtian Religion. Which is become ſo common a Theme among the Scepticks of this Age, that the Author of this Diſcourſe thought it worth his time and care, to conſider the force of the Objections that were made againſt them. Eſpecially, being written in a grave and ſerious manner, and not with that Raillery and Buffonry, which the rude Perſons of this Age commonly beſtow upon Religion. It might be

justly expected from such who pretend to Breeding *and* Civility, *that they would at least shew more respect to a thing, which hath prevailed so much among Men of the best Understanding and Education, and who have had no Interest to carry on by it. For it is against the ordinary Rules of Conversation, to affront that which others think they have great Reason to esteem and love; and they would not endure that scorn and contempt of their meanest Servant, which they too often shew towards Religion, and the things belonging to it. If they are not* in earnest *when they scoff and mock at sacred things, their own consciences will tell them it is a horrible impiety; if they are* in earnest, *let them debate these things calmly and seriously, and let the stronger* Reason *prevail. Men may speak sharply and wittily against the cleerest things in the World, as the* Scepticks

of

of old did against all Certainty of Sense and Reason; but we should think that Man out of his senses, that would now dispute the Being of the Sun, or the Colour of the Snow. We do not say, the Matters of Religion are capable of the same evidence with that of Sense; but it is a great part of judgment and understanding, to know the proportion and fitness of evidence to the Nature of the thing to be proved. They would not have the Eye to judge of tasts, nor the Nose of Metaphysicks; *and yet these would be as proper as to have the senses judge of Immaterial Beings. If we do not give as good Reason for the Principles of our Religion, as the nature of Religion considered, can be given for it, let us then be blamed for our weakness in defending it; but let not Religion suffer, till they are sure nothing more can be said for it.*

There

Tractat. Theol. politic.

There is a late Author, *I hear is mightily in vogue among many, who cry up any thing on the* Atheiſtical *ſide, though never ſo weak and trifling. It were no difficult task to lay open the falſe Reaſonings, and inconſiſtent* Hypotheſes *of his Book; which hath been ſufficiently done already in that Language wherein it was written. But if for the* Advancement *of* Irreligion *among us, that* Book *be, as it is talked, Tranſlated into our Tongue, there will not, I hope, want thoſe who will be as ready to defend* Religion *and* Morality, *as others are to decry and deſpiſe them.*

A Letter of Reſolution to a Perſon unſatisfied about the Truth and Authority of the Scriptures.

SIR,

ALthough I do not pretend to any skill in the *depths of Theology*, yet I am heartily concerned for the *Truth* and *Honour* of the *Chriſtian Religion*; which it is the deſign of your papers to undermine. When I firſt looked them over, I could not think them ſo conſiderable as to deſerve a particular Anſwer; eſpecially, from one in my circumſtances, who have ſo much

other buſineſs lying upon me, and ſo little leiſure and health to perform it; but I found at the concluſion of your Papers, ſo earneſt and vehement a deſire expreſſed by you, that I would return an Anſwer, in order to the ſettlement of your mind, that I could not refuſe an Office of ſo great Charity, as you repreſent it to be. I confeſs, when I conſidered the nature of your Objections, and the manner of managing them, I could hardly believe that they proceeded from a doubtful Mind, that was deſirous of any ſatisfaction; but ſince you tell me ſo, I will firſt ſhew my Charity in believing it, and then in endeavouring to give you my poor aſſiſtance, and impartial advice, in order to your ſatisfaction. And in truth, I think impartial advice will con-

contribute more to that end, than ſpending Time and Paper in running through all the difficulties, which it is poſſible for a cavilling Mind to raiſe againſt the plaineſt *Truths* in the World. For there is nothing ſo clear and evident, but a *Sophiſtical Wit* will always find ſomething to ſay againſt it; and if you be the *Perſon* I take you for, you very well know, that there have been ſome, who wanted neither Wit, nor Eloquence, who have gone about to prove, *That there was Nothing in the World; and that if there were any thing, it could not be underſtood by Men; that if it were underſtood by one Man, it could not be expreſſed to another*: And beſides ſuch extravagant undertakers as theſe, how many have there been, who with plauſible and ſubtle Argu-

ments, have endeavoured to overthrow all manner of *Certainty*, either by *Senſe* or *Reaſon*? Muſt we therefore quit all pretences to *Certainty*, becauſe we cannot, it may be, Anſwer all the Subtilties of the *Scepticks*? And therefore I am by no means ſatisfied with your manner of proceeding, *deſiring all particular difficulties to be Anſwer'd, before we conſider the main evidences of the Chriſtian Faith*: For the only reaſonable way of proceeding in this matter, is to conſider, firſt, whether there be ſufficient *Motives* to perſwade you to imbrace the *Chriſtian Faith*; and then to weigh the difficulties, and to compare them with the *Reaſons* and *Arguments* for believing; and if thoſe do not appear great enough to overthrow the force of the other, you may reſt

ſatisfied

satisfied in the *Christian Faith*, although you cannot Answer every difficulty that may be raised against the *Books* wherein our Religion is contained. I pray Sir, consider with your self; do not you think it possible for any man to have Faith enough to save him, unless he can solve all the difficulties in *Chronologie* that are in the *Bible*, unless he can give an account of every particular *Law* and *Custom* among the *Jews*, unless he can make out all the *Prophetick Schemes*, and can tell what the *Number* of the *Beast* in the *Apocalypse* means? If a Man may believe and be saved, without these things, to what purpose are they objected for the overthrow of the *Christian Faith*? Do you think a Man hath not reason enough to believe there is *extended*

Matter in the World, unleſs he can ſolve all the difficulties that ariſe from the *extenſion* or *diviſibility* of *Matter*; or that he hath a *Soul*, unleſs he can make it clear how an immaterial and material Subſtance can be ſo united as our *Soul* and *Body* are? Or that the *Sun* ſhines, unleſs he can demonſtrate whether the *Sun* or the *Earth* moves? Or that we have any *certainty* of things, unleſs he can aſſign the undoubted *criterion* of *Truth* and *Falſhood* in all things? Theſe things I mention on purpoſe, to let you ſee, that the moſt certain things, have difficulties about them, which no one thinks it neceſſary for him to Anſwer, in order to his aſſurance of the *Truth* of the *things*; but as long as the evidence for them is much more conſiderable than the

Objections

Objections against them, we may safely acquiesce in our assent to them, and leave the unfolding these difficulties to *the Disputers of this World*, or the *Knowledge* of another. Is it not far more reasonable for us to think, that in *Books* of so great *Antiquity*, as those of *Moses* are, written in a Language whose *Idiotisms* are so different from ours, there may be some difficulty in the *Phrases*, or computation of Times or Customs of the People, that we cannot well understand, than that all the Miracles wrought by *Moses* should have been Impostures; and that Law, which was preserved so constantly, maintained with that resolution by the wisest of the People of the *Jews*, who chose to dye rather than disown it, should be

all a cheat? Is it not more reasonable for us to ſuſpect our own Underſtandings, as to the *Speeches* and *Actions* of ſome of the *Prophets*, than to think that Men who deſigned ſo much the advancing Virtue, and diſcouraging Vice, ſhould be a pack of Hypocrites and Deceivers? Can any Man of common ſenſe ſuſpect the *Chriſtian Religion* to be a *Fourb*, or an Impoſture, becauſe he cannot underſtand the Number of the *Beaſt*, or Interpret the *Apocalyptick Viſions*? I could hardly have believed any Man pretending to *Reaſon*, could object theſe things, unleſs I ſaw them, and were called upon to Anſwer them.

Therefore, Sir, my ſerious and impartial advice to you is, in the firſt place to conſider and debate

bate the main point, *i. e.* the proofs of the *Christian Doctrin*, and not to hunt up and down the *Scriptures* for every thing that seems a difficulty to you, and then by heaping all these together to make the *Scriptures* seem a confused heap of indigested stuff, which being taken in pieces and considered, with that modesty, diligence, and care, that doth become us, will appear to contain nothing unbecoming that *Sacred* and *Venerable* Name which the *Scriptures* do bear among us.

If therefore, you design not cavilling but satisfaction, you will joyn issue with me upon the most material point, *viz. Whether the Christian Religion were from God, or from Men?* For if this be proved to have been from *God*, all the other things will easily fall off

off of themſelves, or be removed with a little induſtry.

In the Debate of this, I ſhall conſider, firſt, what things are agreed upon between us, and then wherein the difference lies.

1. *You grant an abſolutely perfect and independent Being, whom we call God.*

2. *That the World was at firſt Created, and is ſtill governed by Him.*

3. *That He is ſo Holy, as to be the Author of no Sin, although he doth not hinder Men from ſinning.*

4. *That this God is to receive from us all Worſhip proper to Him, of Prayers, Praiſes, &c.*

5. *That it is the Will of this God, that we ſhould lead holy, peaceable, and innocent Lives.*

6. *That God will accept mens ſincere*

cere Repentance and hearty endeavours to do his Will, although they do not perfectly obey it.

7. *That there is a State of Rewards and Punishments in another World, according to the course of Mens Lives here.*

8. *That there are many excellent Precepts in the writings of the New Testament inducing to Humility and Selfdenyal, and to the Honour of God, and civil duty and honesty of Life; and these in a more plentiful manner than is to be found in any other Profession of Religion publickly known.*

The Questions then remaining, are, (1) *Whether the matters of Fact are true, which are reported in the Writings of the New Testament?* (2) Supposing them true, *Whether they do sufficiently prove the Doctrin to have been from God?* 1. Whe-

1. *Whether the matters of Fact were true or no?* And as to this point, I wish you had set down the Reasons of your doubting, more clearly and distinctly than you have done: What I can pick up, amounts to these things. 1. *That there can be no certainty of a matter done at such a distance of time, there having been many fictitious Histories in the World.* 2. *That it is probable, that these things might be written, when there was no one Living to detect the falshood of them; and thus you say, the* Grecians, Romans, Egyptians, *and other Nations were at first imposed upon by some Men, who pretended to deliver to them the History of their Gods and Heroes, and the Wonders wrought by them.* 3. *That these things might more easily be done, before Printing was used; and that there is reason to*

suspect

ſuſpect the more, becauſe of the Pious Frauds of the Primitive Chriſtians, and the Legends of the Papiſts. 4. *That there may have been many more Deceptions and Impoſtures in the way of propagating falſe Revelations and Miracles than we can now diſcover.* 5. *That we ought not to take the Teſtimony of Scripture, or the Chriſtian Writers in this caſe, becauſe they may be ſuſpected of partiality; and that the Teſtimony of* Joſephus *is ſuſpected by divers learned Men to be fraudulently put in by Chriſtians.* 6. *That there are ſufficient grounds from the Story it ſelf, and the Objections of Enemies to ſuſpect the truth of it; becauſe of the contradiction and inconſiſtency of the parts of it; the want of accompliſhment of the Promiſes and Prophecies of it; the obſcurity and unintelligibleneſs of other parts; the defects of the Perſons*

ſons mentioned therein, St. Paul's *oſtentation, the jarrs between* Peter *and* Paul, *and* Paul *and* Barnabas. 7. *That from theſe things you have juſt cauſe to doubt the Apoſtles ſincerity, and you think they might have indirect ends in divulging the Miracles recorded in Scripture; and that Men might be contented to ſuffer, to make themſelves heads of a new Sect of Religion, and to rule over the Conſciences of Men; and that they had time enough to make a conſiderable intereſt before the Perſecutions began.*

This is the force of all I can find out, in the ſeveral parts of your Papers towards the invalidating the Teſtimony concerning the *matters* of *fact* reported in the Writings of the New Teſtament.

In Anſwer to all theſe things, I ſhall ſhew; 1. That matters of

of fact done at such a distance of time may have sufficient evidence to oblige Men to believe them. 2. That there is no reason to suspect the Truth of those Matters of fact which are contained in the History of the New Testament. 3. That the *Apostles* gave the greatest testimonies of their Sincerity, that could be expected from them; and that no matters of fact were ever better attested than those which are reported by them; from whence it will follow, That it is not reason but unreasonable *Suspicion* and *Scepticism*, if not willfulness and obstinacy which makes Men to continue to doubt after so great evidence.

1. That we may have such evidence of *Matters* of *Fact* done at such a *distance* of time as may oblige

oblige us to believe the Truth of them. This we are first to make out, because several of your Objections seem to imply, *That we can have no certainty of such things; because we cannot know what tricks may have been plaid in former times, when it was far more easie to deceive; and that it is confessed, there have been several Frauds of this kind, which have a long time prevailed in the World.* But have not the very same Arguments been used against all *Religion*, by *Atheists?* And if the *Cheats* that have been in *Religion*, have no force against the *Being* of *God*, why should they have any against the *Christian Religion?* And if the common consent of Mankind signifie any thing as to the acknowledgement of a *Deity*, why should not the

Testi-

Testimony of the *Christian Church*, so circumstantiated as it is, be of sufficient strength to receive the Matters of Fact delivered by it? which is all I at present desire. Do we question any of the Stories delivered by the common consent of *Greek* or *Latin Historians*, although we have only the bare Testimony of those Historians for them? And yet your *Objections* would lye against every one of them: How do we know the great prevalency of the *Roman Empire*? was it not delivered by those who belonged to it, and were concerned to make the best of it? What know we, but *thousands* of *Histories* have been lost, that confuted all that we now have concerning the greatness of *Rome*? What know we, but that *Rome* was destroyed

by *Carthage*, or that *Hannibal* quite overthrew the *Roman Empire*; or that *Catiline* was one of the best Men in the World, because all our present Histories were written by Men of the other side? How can we tell but that the *Persians* destroyed the *Macedonians*, because all our *Accounts* of *Alexanders* Expedition are Originally from the *Greeks*? And why might not we suspect greater partiality in all these Cases, when the Writers did not give a thousand part of that evidence for their fidelity, that the First *Christians* did? And yet, what should we think of such a person who should call in question the best Histories of all Nations, because they are written by those of the same *Countrey*? By which it seems, you will never allow

any

any competent Teſtimony at all; for if ſuch things be written by Enemies and Strangers, we have reaſon to ſuſpect both their knowledge and integrity; if written by *Friends*, then though they might know the *Truth*, yet they would write partially of their own ſide: So that upon this principle, no Hiſtory at all, ancient or modern is to be believed; for they are all reported either by Friends or Enemies: and ſo not only Divine, but all Humane Faith will be deſtroyed. I am by no means a Friend to unreaſonable credulity; but I am as little to unreaſonable diſtruſt and ſuſpicion; if the one be Folly, the other is Madneſs. No prudent Man believes any thing, becauſe it is poſſible to be true; nor rejects any thing meerly becauſe

it is possible to be false: But it is the prudence of every Man to weigh and consider all circumstances, and according to them, to assent, or dissent. We all know it is possible for Men to deceive, or to be deceived, but we know there is no necessity of either; and that there is such a thing as Truth in the World; and though Men may deceive, yet they do not always so; and that Men may know they are not deceived. For else there could be no such thing as *Society* among Mankind; no *Friendship*, or *Trust*, or *Confidence* in the Word of another person; because it is possible that the best Friend I have may deceive me, and the World is full of dissimulation, must I therefore believe no Body? This is the just consequence of this way

way of Arguing, *That we have reason to suspect the Truth of these Matters of Fact, because there have been many Frauds in the World, and might have been many more than we can now discover*; for if this Principle be pursued, it will destroy all Society among Men; which is built on the supposition of mutual trust and confidence that Men have in each other: And although it be possible for all Men to deceive, because we cannot know one anothers hearts, yet there are such Characters of Honesty and Fidelity in some Persons, that others dare venture their Lives and Fortunes upon their Words. And is any Man thought a Fool for doing so? Nay, have not the most prudent and sagacious Men reposed a

mighty confidence in the Integrity of others? And without this, no great affairs can be carried on in the World; for since the greatest Persons need the help of others to manage their business, they must trust other Men continually; and every Man puts his Life into the hands of others, to whom he gives any freedome of access, and especially his Servants: Must a Man therefore live in continual suspicion and jealousie, because it is possible he may be deceived? But if this be thought unreasonable, then we gain thus much, that notwithstanding the possibility of deception, Men may be trusted in some cases, and their Fidelity safely relied upon: This being granted, we are to enquire what that assurance is which makes us trust

truſt any one; and whereever we find a concurrence of the ſame circumſtances, or equal evidence of fidelity, we may repoſe the ſame truſt or confidence in them. And we may ſoon find that it is not any ones bare Word that makes us truſt him; but either the reputation of his Integrity among diſcerning Men; or our long experience and obſervation of him: This latter is only confined to our own tryal; but the former is more general, and reaches beyond our own Age, ſince we may have the *Teſtimony* of diſcerning Perſons convey'd down to us in as certain a manner, as we can know the mind of a *Friend* at a 100 Miles diſtance, *viz.* by Writing. And in this caſe, we deſire no more than to be ſatisfied that thoſe things were writ-

ten by them; and that they deſerved to be believed in what they writ; thus, if any one would be ſatisfied about the paſſages of the *Peloponneſian War*, and hath heard that *Thucydides* hath accurately written it, he hath no more to do, than to enquire whether this *Thucydides* were capable of giving a good account of it, and for that, he hears that he was a great and inquiſitive Perſon, that lived in that Age, and knew all the occurrences of it; and when he is ſatisfied of that, his next enquiry is, whether he may be truſted or no; and for this, he can expect no better ſatisfaction, than that his Hiſtory hath been in great reputation for its integrity among the moſt knowing Perſons; but how ſhall he be ſure this was the Hiſtory, written by

Thucy-

Thucydides, since there have been many counterfeit Writings obtruded upon the World? Besides the consent of learned Men in all Ages since, we may compare the *Testimonies* cited out of it with the History we have, and the Style, with the Character given of *Thucydides*, and the Narrations, with other credible Histories of those *Times*; and if all these agree, what reason can there be not to rely upon the History of *Thucydides*? All learned Men do acknowledge, that there have been multitudes of fictitious writings, but do they therefore question, whether there are any genuine? Or whether we have not the true *Herodotus*, *Strabo*, or *Pausanias*, because there is a counterfeit *Berosus*, *Manetho*, and *Philo*, set forth by *Annius* of *Viterbo*? Do any

any ſuſpect whether we have any of the genuin Works of *Cicero*, becauſe an *Italian* counterfeited a Book *De Conſolatione* in his name? Or whether *Cæſars Commentaries* were his own, becauſe it is uncertain who Writ the *Alexandrian War* that is joyned with them? By which we ſee, that we may not only be certain of the Fidelity of Perſons we converſe with, but of all things neceſſary to our belief of what was done at a great diſtance of time from the *Teſtimony* of Writers, notwithſtanding the many ſuppoſititious Writings that have been in the World.

But it may be ſaid, *That all this only relates to meer matters of Hiſtory, wherein a Man is not much concerned whether they be true or falſe; but the things we are about are matters*

that

hat Mens Salvation or Damnation are
id to depend upon, and therefore
reater evidence should be given of
hese, to oblige Men to believe them.

To this I answer. 1. That
ny design herein, was to prove,
hat notwithstanding the possibi-
ty of deception, there may be
fficient ground for a prudent
nd firm assent to the Truth of
hings done at as great a distance
f time, and convey'd after the
ame manner, that the Matters
of Fact reported in the *New Te-*
stament are; and hereby those ge-
neral prejudices are shewed to be
unreasonable: And all that I de-
sire from this discourse is, that
you would give an assent of the
same nature to the History of the
Gospel, that you do to *Cæsar*, or
Livy, or *Tacitus*, or any other
ancient Historian. 2. As to the
greater

greater obligation to assent, I say it depends upon the evidence of Divine Revelation, which is given by the Matters of Fact which are delivered to us. And here give me leave to ask you 1. Whether it be any ways repugnant to any conception you have of God, for him to make use of fallible Men to make known his Will to the World? 2. Whether those Men, though supposed to be in themselves fallible, can either deceive, or be deceived, when God makes known his Mind to them? 3. Whether on supposition, that God hath made use of such Persons for this end, those are not obliged to believe them, who do not live in the same *Age* with them? If not, then *God* must either make no *Revelation* at all,

or

or he muſt make a New one every Age: If they are, then the obligation lies as much on us now to believe, as if we had lived and converſed with thoſe inſpired Perſons.

2. That there is no reaſon to ſuſpect the Truth of thoſe Matters of Fact which are reported in the *New Teſtament*; For ſince it is univerſally agreed among Men, that Humane *Teſtimony* is a ſufficient ground for aſſent, where there is no poſitive ground for ſuſpicion; becauſe deceiving and being deceived, is not the common Intereſt of Mankind; therefore we are to conſider what the general grounds of *ſuſpicion* are, and whether any of them do reach the *Apoſtles Teſtimony*, concerning the Matters of Fact reported by them. And the juſt grounds

grounds of ſuſpicion are theſe
1. If the *Perſons* be otherwi
known to be Men of artifice an
cunning, full of tricks and diſſi
mulation, and that make n
Conſcience of ſpeaking Truth
ſo a Lye tends to their greate
advantage; which is too muc
the *Papiſts* caſe in their *Legend*
and *Stories* of *Miracles*. 2. I
they temper and ſuit their Stor
and Doctrin to the *Humour* an
Genius of the People, they hop
to prevail upon, as *Mahomet* did
in encouraging *War* and *Laſcivious*
neſs. 3. If they lay the Scene o
their Story at a mighty diſtanc
from themſelves, at ſuch an Age,
wherein it is impoſſible either to
prove, or diſprove; which i
the caſe of the *Brachmans*, as to
their *Brahmà*, and their *Veda*;
and was of the *Heathens* as to
their

their Fabulous Deities. 4. If there be any thing contained in the Story, which is repugnant to the most authentick Histories of those times; by which means the Impostures of *Annius* have been discovered. 5. If there be evident contradiction in the Story it self; or any thing repugnant to, or unbecoming the Majesty, Holiness, Sincerity, and Consistency of a Divine Revelation; on which account we reject *Fanatick* pretences to *Revelations*. If there were any thing of this nature in the *Writings* of the *New Testament*, we might then allow there were some ground to suspect the *Truth* of what is contained therein: But I shall undertake, by the Grace of God, to defend that there is not any foundation for suspicion as to any one of these. 1. As

1. As to the *Persons*, such who go about to deceive others, must be Men that are versed in business and know how to deal with Men; and that have some interest already that they have gained by other means, before they can carry on such a design as to abuse Mankind, by Lyes and Impostures in *Religion*: Therefore the *Atheists* lay the deceiving the World by *Religion*, to the Charge of *Politicians* and *Law-givers*, to Men versed in the practice of Fraud, such as *Numa*, or *Lycurgus*, or *Xaca*, or *Mahomet*, such as understood the ways of cajoling the People; or to *subtle Priests*, that know how to suit the hopes and fears of the superstitious multitude; whence came the multitude of Frauds in the *Heathen Temples* and *Oracles*. But would any

any Man in the World have pitched upon a few *Fishermen*, and illiterate Persons, to carry on such an intrigue as this? Men that were rude and unexperienced in the World, and uncapable of dealing in the way of Artifice with one of the common Citizens of *Hierusalem*. When was it ever heard that such Men made such an alteration in the *Religion* of the World, as the Primitive *Christians* did, against the most violent persecutions? And when they prevailed so much, the common charge still against them was, that they were a company of *Rude, Mean, Obscure, Illiterate, Simple Men*: And yet in spight of all the Cunning, and Malice, and Learning, and Strength of their Adversaries, they gained ground upon them, and prevailed over

the *Obſtinacy* of the *Jews*, and
Wiſdom of the *Greeks*. If th
Chriſtian Religion had been a mee
deſign of the *Apoſtles* to mak
themſelves *Heads* of a new *Sect*
what had this been but to hav
ſet the Cunning of twelve, o
thirteen Men, of no Intereſt
or Reputation, againſt the *Wi*
dom and *Power* of the whol
World? If they had any *Wiſdom*
they would never have unde
taken ſuch an impoſſible deſig
as this muſt appear to them
firſt view: And if they ha
none, how could they ever hop
to manage it? If their aim wer
only at Reputation, they migh
have thought of thouſands o
ways more probable, and mor
advantageous than this: If w
ſuppoſe Men ſhould be willin
to hazard their Lives for the

Repu

Reputations, we may suppose withall such Men to have so much cunning as not to do it till they cannot help it; but if they can have Reputation and ease together, they had rather have it. I will therefore put the Case concerning the only Person that had the advantage of a Learned Education among the *Apostles*; *viz.* St. *Paul*, and whom you seem to strike at more than the rest: Is it reasonable to believe, that when he was in favour with the *Sanhedrin*, and was likely to advance himself by his opposition to *Christianity*, and had a fair prospect of Ease and Honour together; he should quit all this, to joyn with such an inconsiderable and hated company, as the *Christians* were, only to be one of the *Heads* of a very small

Number of Men, and to pur-
chaſe it at ſo dear a rate as th
loſs of his Friends and Intereſt
and running on continual Trou
bles and Perſecutions, to the ha
zard of his Life? It is poſſibl
for Men that are deceived an
mean honeſtly to do this; bu
it is ſcarce ſuppoſable of a Ma
in his Senſes that ſhould know
and believe all this to be a *cheat*
and yet own and embrace it, to ſ
great diſadvantage to himſelf
When he could not make himſe
ſo conſiderable by it, as he migh
have been without it. Me
muſt love *cheating* the World at
ſtrange rate, that will let go fai
hopes of preferment and eaſe
and lead a life of perpetual trou
ble, and expoſe themſelves t
the utmoſt hazards, only for th
ſake of deluding others. If th

Apoſtle

Apostles knew all they said to be false, and made it so necessary for all Men to believe what they said to be true; they were some of the greatest deceivers which the World had ever known: But Men that take pleasure in deceiving, make use of many artifices on purpose to catch the silly multitude; they have all the arts of Insinuation and Fawning Speeches, fit to draw in the weakest, and such as love to be flatter'd; but what is there tending this way in all the Apostles Writings? How sharply do they speak to the *Jewish Sanhedrin*, upon the Murther of Christ? With what plainness and simplicity do they go about to perswade Men to be *Christians*? They barely tell the Matters of Fact concerning the *Resurrection* of *Christ*,

and ſay *they were eye-witneſſes of it*, and upon the credit of this *Teſtimony* of theirs, they Preach *Faith* and *Repentance* to *Jews*, and *Gentiles*: Was ever any thing farther from the appearance of Artifice than this was? So that if they were deceivers, they were ſome of the Subtileſt that ever were in the World, becauſe there ſeems to be ſo little ground for any ſuſpicion of Fraud; and we cannot eaſily imagin Perſons of their Education, capable of ſo profound diſſimulation and ſo artificial a Cheat. Beſides all this, we are to conſider how far ſuch Perſons do allow the liberty of *diſſimulation* and *artificial Juglings*, eſpecially in *Religion*; we ſee the *Papiſts* could not practice theſe things, without being forced to defend them, by ſhewing how

how convenient it is for the People to be told strange Stories of *Saints*, on purpose *to nourish Devotion* in them: To which end, they say, *it signifies not much, whether they were true or no*: And withall they assert the *Lawfulness of Equivocations*, *and Mental Reservations*, *and doing things*, *not otherwise justifiable*, *for the Honour of their Church and Religion*; And I shall freely confess to you, if I found any countenance to such things as these, from the Doctrin or Practice of the *Apostles*, it would give me too just a ground for suspicion as to what they deliver'd. For if they allowed *Equivocations*, or *Mental Reservations*, how could I possibly know what they meant by any thing they said? For that which was necessary to make the Proposition true,

lay without my reach in the Mind of another; and while they so firmly attested that *Christ was risen from the Dead*, they might understand it of a *Spiritual* or *Mystical Resurrection*; but if they should be found to allow *Lying* or *Cheating for the cause of Religion*, their credit would be gone with me; for how could I be any longer sure of the *Truth* of one Word they said? I should be so far from thinking them *Infallible*, that I could not but suspect them to have a design to deceive me. The first thing therefore we are to look at in Persons who require our belief, is the strictest veracity; if they falter in this, they expose themselves to the suspicion of all but credulous Fools. But we no where find greater plainness and sincerity required,

no

no where more strict and severe prohibitions of dissimulation in *Religion*, nor more general Precepts about *speaking Truth*, than in the Writings of the *New Testament*. *But might not all this be done with the greater artifice to prevent suspicion?* Suspicion is a thing, which *he that set bounds to the Sea*, can set no bounds to; if Men will give way to it, without reason, there can be no end of it. For the most effectual ways to prevent it, will still afford new matter and occasion for it. If Men do use the utmost means that are possible, to assure others of their sincerity, and they will not believe them, but still suspect the design to be so much deeper laid; there is no way left possible to satisfy such Men; their suspicion is a disease incurable

rable by rational means, and such persons deserve to be given over as past all remedy. If Men act like prudent Men, they will judge according to the *Reason* of *Things*; but if they entertain a jealousie of all Mankind, and the most of those who give them the greatest assurance they have no Intention to deceive them, it is to no purpose to go about to satisfie such Persons, for that very undertaking makes them more suspicious. If the *Apostles* therefore gave as much ground as ever any *Persons* did, or could do, that they had no design to impose upon the World, but proceeding with all the fairness and openness, with the greatest evidence of their sincerity, there can be no reason to fasten upon them the imputation of cunning

Men

Men who made it their buſineſs to deceive others.

2. This will more appear if we conſider the *Matters* deliver'd by them, and the nature of their Doctrin. For if the *Chriſtian Religion* were only a contrivance of the firſt Preachers of it, it muſt by the event be ſuppoſed that they were very ſubtle Men, who in ſo little time, and againſt ſo great oppoſition could prevail over both *Jews* and *Gentiles*; but if we reflect on the *nature* of their *Doctrin*, we can never imagin that theſe Men did proceed by the ſame Methods that Men of ſubtilty do make uſe of. If it were there own contrivance, it was in their power to have framed it as they thought fit themſelves; and in all probability, they would have done it in a way moſt

most likely to be successful; but the *Christian Religion* was so far from it, as though they had industriously designed to advance a *Religion* against the *genius* and *inclination* of all Mankind. For it neither gratifies the voluptuous in their Pleasures, nor the Ambitious in their desires of External Pomp and Greatness, nor the Covetous in their thirst after Riches; but lays a severe restraint on all those common and prevailing Passions of Mankind; which *Mahomet* well understood, when he suited his *Religion* to them. *Christianity* was neither accommodated to the Temper and Genius either of *Jews* or *Gentiles*: The *Jews* were in great expectation of a Temporal *Prince* at that time to deliver them from the *Roman* Slavery; and every one

one that would have ſet up for ſuch a *Meſſias*, might have had followers enough among them, as we find afterwards by the attempts of *Barchocebas* and others. But the *Meſſias* of the *Chriſtians* was ſo directly contrary to their hopes and expectations, being a *poor* and *ſuffering Prince*, that this ſet them the more againſt his Followers, becauſe they were hereby fruſtrated of their greateſt hopes, and defeated in their moſt pleaſing expectations: But beſides, if they would have taken in the *Moſaick Law*, it might in probability have ſucceeded better; but this St. *Paul* would by no means hear of. *But if they rejected the Jews, methinks they ſhould have been willing to have had ſome aſſiſtance from the Gentiles.* No, they charged them with

Idolatry

Idolatry where ever they came, and would not joyn in any parts of their Worſhip with them, nor ſo much as Eat of the *remainder* of their *Sacrifices*. But ſuppoſing they had a mind to ſet up wholly a new *Sect* of their own; yet we ſhould think they ſhould have framed it after the moſt plauſible manner, and left out all things thar were moſt liable to Reproach and Infamy: But this they were ſo far from, that the moſt contemptible part of the *Chriſtian Religion*, viz. *A Crucified Saviour*, they inſiſt the moſt upon, and Preach it on all occaſions, and in compariſon of it, ſtrangely deſpiſe all the *Wiſdom* and *Philoſophy* of the *Greeks*. What did theſe Men mean, if *Chriſtianity* had been only a *contrivance* of theirs? If they had but left out this

this one circumstance, in all Human probability, the excellent moral Precepts in *Christianity* would have been highly magnified among all those who had been bred up under the Instructions of *Philosophers*. Nay, they would not make use of the most commendable Methods of Humane Wisdom; nor do as the *Jesuits* have done in *China*, make Men have a better opinion of the *Religion* they brought, for their skill in *Mathematicks* and *Astronomy*; but as much as it was possible, to let the World see it was no contrivance of Humane Wisdom, they shunned all the ways of shewing it in the manner of its propagation. Nay, when the People would have given the *Apostles* Divine Worship, never were vain Men more concerned

to

to have it, than they to oppose it; And do these things look like the Actions of Men that designed only to make themselves great, by being the *Heads* of a new *Sect* of *Religion*?

3. Men that made it their design to deceive the World, if they had thought it necessary to bring in any matter of *Story* concerning the *Author* of their *Religion* would have placed it at such *a distance of time*, that it was not capable of being disproved: As it is apparent in the *Heathen Mythologie*; for the Stories were such, as no person could ever pretend to confute them otherwise than by the inconsistency of them with the common principles of *Religion*. But if we suppose *Christianity* to have been a meer device, would the *Apostles* have

have been so senseless to have laid the main proof of their *Religion* on a thing which was but newly acted, and which they were very capable of enquiring into all the Circumstances that related to it, *viz.* the *Resurrection of Christ from the Dead.* We may see by the whole design of the *New Testament*, the great stress of *Christianity* was laid upon the Truth of this; to this, *Christ* himself appealed before hand: to this all the *Apostles* refer as the mighty confirmation of their Religion; and this they deliver as a thing which themselves had seen, and had conversed with him for 40 Days together, with all the demonstrations imaginable of a *true* and *real Body*: And that not to one or two credulous Persons, but so

many of them who were hard to be satisfied, and one, not without the most sensible evidence; but besides these, they tell us of 500 *at once who saw him*, *where many were then living* when those things were written. Now I pray tell me what *Religion* in the World ever put it self upon so fair a tryal as this? Of a plain Matter of Fact as capable of being attested as any could be. Why did not *Amida*, or *Brahma*, or *Xaca*, or any other of the Authors of the present *Religions* of the *East Indies*? Why did not *Orpheus*, or *Numa*, or any other introducers of *Religious* Customs among the *Greeks* or *Romans*? Or *Mahomet* among the *Arabians* put the issue of the Truth of their *Religion* on such a plain and easie *tryal* as this? If you say *That Christ appeared*

appeared only to his Friends, who were ready to believe such things, and not among his Enemies: I Answer, That though they were his *Friends*, yet they were very hard to be perswaded of the *truth* of it at first; and afterwards gave larger Testimonies of their fidelity than the Testimony of the greatest *Enemies* would have been; for we should have had only their *bare Words* for it, (if they would have given that, which is very questionable, considering their dealing with the other *Miracles* of *Christ*:) But the *Apostles* manifested their *sincerity* by all real proofs that could be thought sufficient to satisfie Mankind; appealing to the very Persons who were concerned the most in it, having a hand in the Death of *Christ*, declaring their grea-

test readiness to suffer any thing rather than deny the Truth of it, and laying down their Lives at last for it. If all this had been a meer Fiction, how unlikely is it, that among so many as were conscious of it, no one person by hopes or fears, by flatteries or threatnings, could ever be prevailed upon to deny the Truth of it. If there had been any such thing, what triumphing had there been among the *Jews*; and no doubt his name had been Recorded to Posterity among the Writers both of *Jews* and *Gentiles* that were professed Enemies of *Christianity*. But they are all wonderfully silent in this matter; and instead of saying enough to overthrow the *truth of Christianity*, as you seem to suggest, I do assure you, I am

mightily

mightily confirmed in the belief of the Truth of it, by carefully observing the slightness of the Objections that were made against it, by its most professed Enemies.

But you seem to imply, *That all this Story concerning Christ was invented long after the pretended time of his being in the World*, Why may not you as well suspect, that *Julius Cæsar* lived before *Romulus*; or that *Augustus* lived at the Seige of *Troy*? For you might as well reject all History upon such grounds as those you assign; and think *Mahomet* as right in his *Chronology*, as the *Bible*. It is time for us to burn all our *Books*, if we have lived in such a Cheat all this while. Methinks you might as well ask, whether *Lucretia* were not *Pope Joan*? Or

Alexander the *sixth*, one of the *Roman Emperours*? Or whether *Luther* were not the *Emperour* of *Turky*? For there is no greater evidence of any History in the World, than there is, that all the things reported in the *New Testament* were done at that time, when they are pretended to be.

4. Therefore we offer this Story of the *New Testament* to be compared with all the *Circumstances of that Age*, delivered by any other *Historians*, to try if any *inconsistencies* can be found therein: Which is the most reasonable way can be taken to disprove any History. If it could be proved, that there could be no such *Taxation* of the *Empire* as is mention'd in the time of *Augustus*, that *Herod* did not live in that

that *Age*, or that the *Jews* were not under the *Roman Government*, or that there were no *High Priests* at that time, nor the *Sects* of *Pharisees* and *Saducees*, or that there were any other remarkable *characters* of time set down in the *History* of the *New Testament*, which could be manifestly disproved; there were some pretence to call in Question the Truth of the Story; but there is not the least Foundation for any scruple on this account; All things agreeing so well with the truest accounts we have of that *Age*, both from *Josephus* and the *Roman Historie*. I shall not insist on the particular *Testimony* of *Josephus* concerning *Christ*, because we need it not; and if those who question it, would proceed with the same severity against many

other particular passages in good *Authors*, they might as well call them in question as they do that; since it is confessed, that all the Ancient *Manuscripts* have it in them, and supposing that it doth not come in well, must we suppose it impossible for *Josephus* to Write incoherently? Yet this is the main Argument that ever I have seen urged against this *Testimony* of *Josephus*. But I say, we need it not; all other things concurring in so high a degree to prove the *Truth* of the *History* of *Christ*. Yet since you seem to express so much doubtfulness concerning it, *as though it were framed when there was no one living capable of disproving it*; give me leave to shew you the great absurdity of such a Supposition. 1. Because we have the plain Testimonies of the

the greateſt Enemies of *Chriſtianity*, that there was ſuch a Perſon as *Chriſt* was, who ſuffered according to the *Scripture Story*. For *Tacitus* not only mentions the *Chriſtians* as ſuffering at *Rome* for their *Religion* in the *time* of *Nero*, (*Annal.* 15.) but ſaith, *That the Author of this Religion was one Chriſt, who ſuffered under* Pontius Pilate, *Procurator of* Judea, *in the time of* Tiberius; which is an irrefragable Teſtimony of the *Truth* of the Story concerning *Chriſt*, in an *Age*, when if it had been falſe, nothing could have been more eaſily detected than ſuch a Fiction, by the number of *Jews* which were continually at *Rome*: And neither *Julian*, nor *Celſus*, nor *Porphyrie*, nor *Lucian* did ever queſtion the *truth* of the Story it ſelf; but only upbraided

braided the *Christians* for attributing too much to *Christ*. 2. If there were really such a Person as Christ was, who suffered as *Tacitus* saith, then the whole Story could not be a Fiction, but only some part of it; and these additional parts must either be contrived by the *Apostles*, or after their time: Not after their time, for then they must be added after *Christianity* was received in the World, for that, as appears by *Tacitus*, was spread in the *Apostles* times as far as *Rome*; and if these parts were not received with it; the Cheat would presently have been discover'd as soon as broached, by those who had embraced *Christianity* before: And besides, *Tertullian* in his time appeals to the *Authentick Writings* of the *Apostles* themselves, which were

were then extant, wherein the same things were contained, that we now believe: If these things then were forged, it must be by the *Apostles* themselves; and I dare now appeal to you, whether ever any Story was better capable of being disproved than this was, if it had not been true, since it was published in that very time and place, where the *Persons* were living, who were most concerned to disprove it: As appears by the hatred of the *Jews* to the *Christians*, both then and ever since: which is a very observable circumstance for proving the *truth* of *Christian Religion*; for the *Jews* and *Christians* agreed in the *Divine Revelations* of old, the *Christians* believed moreover, that *Christ* was the *Messias* promised; this *Christ* lived and dyed among the

the *Jews* his Enemies; his *Apostles* Preached, and wrought Miracles among their most inveterate Enemies, which Men that go about to deceive never care to do: And to this Day the *Jews* do not deny the *Matters of Fact*, but look on them as insufficient to prove *Jesus* of *Nazareth* to have been the *Messias*: Nay, *Mahomet* himself, who in all probability would have overthrown the whole Story of the *New Testament*, if he could have done it with any colour, yet speaks very honourably of *Christ* and of the great things which were said and done by him.

5. That there is nothing in the *Christian Religion*, unbecoming the *Majesty*, or *Holiness*, or *Truth* of a *Divine Revelation*. As to the precepts, *you acknowledge their excellency*;

cellency; and the *Promises* chiefly refer either to *Divine Grace*, or *future Glory*; And what is there herein unbecoming *God*? And as to what concerns the *Truth* of it, we have as great Characters of that throughout, as it is possible for us to expect; there appearing so much simplicity, sincerity, candour, and agreement in all the parts of it. Some Men would have been better pleased, it may be, if it had been all written by one *Person*, and digested into a more exact method, and set forth with all the Lights and Ornaments of Speech. This would have better become an Invention of Men, but not a *Revelation* of *God*: Plainness and simplicity have a natural greatness above art and subtilty; and therefore *God* made choice of many

many to write, and at several times, that by comparing them we may see how far they were from contriving together, and yet how exactly they agree in all things which Men are concerned to believe. But you say, *We have many infirmities of the* Apostles *discovered therein, their heats and animosities one against another.* But I pray consider; 1. How came you to know these things; Is it not by their own Writings? And if they had been such, who minded only their applause, had it not been as easie to have concealed these things, and would they not certainly have done it, if that had been their aim? If *St.* Paul *seems to boast,* doth he not do it, with that constraint to himself, as a Man that is forced to do it for his own vindication against

against malicious Enemies? And who ever denyed a Man of a generous mind the liberty of speaking for himself? 2. But suppose *they had infirmities and heats among them*; doth this prove that *God* could not make use of them as his Instruments to declare his *Truth* to the World? Then it will follow, that *God* must never reveal his will by *Men*, but by *Voices* from *Heaven*, or *Angels*, or the *assumption* of the *humane Nature by the Divine*. But, if *God* be not denyed the liberty of imploying meer Men, we cannot find so great evidences of Piety and Zeal, of Humility and Self-denyal, of Patience and Magnanimity, of Innocency and universal Charity in any Men as were in the *Apostles*; And therefore did appear with the most

most proper *Characters* of *Embassadors* from Heaven. And I dare venture the comparison of them with the best *Philosophers*, as to the greatest and most excellent *virtues*, for which they were the most admired; notwithstanding the mighty difference as to their Education; allowing but the same Truth as to the Story of the *New Testament*, which we yield to *Xenophon*, or *Diogenes Laertius*, or any other Writers concerning them.

But what is it then which you object against the Writings of the *New Testament*, to make them inconsistent with the Wisdom of God? I find but two things in the Papers you sent me. 1. *Want of the continuance of the Power of Miracles, which you say is Promised.* Mark

16.

16. 17. 2. *The number of the Beast in the Revelations.* But, Good Sir, consider, what it is to call in question a Divine Revelation for such Objections as these are? Must there be no Revelation, unless you understand every Prophecy, or the extent of every promise? Be not so injurious to your own Soul, for the sake of such Objections, to cast away the great assurance which the *Christian Religion* gives us, as to the Pardon of Sin upon Repentance here, and eternal Happiness in another World. Would you reject all the Writings of *Plato*, because you do no more understand some part of his *Timæus* than the number of 666? You must have a very nice faith, that can bear with no difficulties at all, so that if there be but

one or two hard things that you cannot digeſt, you muſt throw up all the beſt Food you have taken; at this rate you muſt ſtarve your Body, as well as ruin your Soul. But of theſe places afterwards.

3. I have hitherto removed the grounds of Suſpicion, I now come to ſhew the poſitive Teſtimonies of their *Sincerity* which the *Apoſtles* ſhewed, which were greater than were ever given to any other Matter of Fact in the *World*. I will then ſuppoſe the whole *Truth* of the *Chriſtian Doctrine* to be reduced to this one Matter of Fact, Whether *Chriſt did riſe from the dead or no?* for (as I have ſaid already) it is plain, the *Apoſtles* put the main force of all that they ſaid upon the *Truth* of this; and often declared, that they were appointed to be the

Witneſſes

Witnesses of this thing. Now let us consider how it is possible for Men to give the highest assurance of their *sincerity* to others; and that must be either by giving the utmost Testimony that Men can give; or by giving some Testimony above that of Men, which cannot deceive, which is the *Testimony of God*.

1. They gave the *utmost Testimony* that meer Men could give of their *fidelity*. I know no better way we have for a full assurance as to any humane Testimony, than to consider what those Circumstances are which are generally allowed to accompany Truth, and if we have the concurrence of all these, we have as much as can be expected: For nothing that depends on *Testimony* can be proved by *Mathema-*

tical Demonſtration. But notwith
ſtanding the want of this, eithe
we may have ſufficient ground t
aſſent to *Truth* upon *Teſtimony*, o
there can be no difference know
between *Truth* and *Falſhood* b
Humane *Teſtimony*; which over
throws all Judicial proceeding
among Men; the *Juſtice* where
of doth ſuppoſe not only th
veracity of *Humane Teſtimony*; Bu
that it may be ſo diſcerned b
others, that they may ſafely re
ly upon it. Now the main thing
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Humane Teſtimony are theſe. 1.
Men teſtifie nothing but wh
they ſaw. 2. If they teſtifie
at no long diſtance of time fro
the thing done. 3. If they te
ſtifie it plainly, and witho
doubtful expreſſions. 4. If
great number agree in the ſam

Teſti

Testimony. 5. If they part with all that is valuable to Mankind, rather than deny the Truth of what they have testified; And where all these concur, it is hardly possible to suppose greater evidence to be given of the *Truth* of a *Thing*; and now I shall shew that all these do exactly agree to the *Apostles Testimony* concerning the *Resurrection* of *Christ*.

1. They testified nothing but what they saw themselves. The *Laws* of *Nations* do suppose that greater credit is to be given to *eye witnesses* than to any others, thence the Rule in the Civil Law *Testimonium de auditu regulariter non valet*: Because, say the *Civilians* and *Canonists*, *Witnesses are to testifie the Truth, and not barely the possibility of things*; that which Men see, they can testifie whether

they are or not: That which Men only hear, may be, or not be; and their *Testimony* is not of the *Fact*, but is looked on as more uncertain, and ought to have greater allowances given it; but the Apostles testified only *what they saw and handled*; and that after the most scrupulous enquiry into the *Truth* of *Christ's Body*, and after many *doubts* and *suspicions* among themselves about it; so that they did not seem hastily and rashly to believe what they afterwards declared to the World. Now a *Body* was a proper object of Sense, and no trial could be greater, or more accurate than theirs was; nor any satisfaction fuller than putting their *fingers* into the very *wounds* of the *pierced side*.

2. They did not stay till the

circum-

circumstances might have slipt out of their Memories, before they testified these things; but very soon after, while the impression of them was fresh upon them: If they had let these Matters alone for any long time, the *Jews* would have asked them presently, if these things were true, why did we not hear of them as soon as they were done? Therefore we see the Apostles on the very day of *Pentecost*, a little after *Christs ascension* to Heaven, openly and boldly declare the *Truth* of these things, not in private corners among a few *Friends*, but in the most solemn meeting of their Nation from all parts; which was the worst time could have been chosen, if they had any intention to deceive.

3. They testifie it in as *plain a manner* as is possible, on purpose to prevent all mistakes of their meaning, *This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are Witnesses; Therefore let all the House of* Israel *know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.* Men that had a mind to deceive would have used some more general and doubtful words, than these were.

Acts 2. 32. 36.

4. If this had been testified by one single witness, the World would have suspected the Truth of his Testimony; for according to the Rule in the *Civil Law* in the case of *Testimony, Vox unius, vox nullius est*: But this was testified by very many; not meerly by the twelve Apostles, but by 500 at once; among whom some might

might be supposed to have so much honesty, or at least capable of being perswaded to have discovered the Imposture, if they had in the least suspected any.

5. But that which adds the greatest weight to all this, is, that there was not one of all the Apostles, and scarce any one of the rest, but exposed themselves to the utmost *hazards* and *dangers*, rather than deny or retract the *Truth* of what they witnessed. If the *People* had been careless and indifferent about *Religion*, it is possible Men might have gone on in a Lye so long till they had gotten *interest* enough to maintain it; but no sooner did the Apostles appear, witnessing these things, but they met with an early and vigorous opposition, and that from the chiefest Men in *Power*,

Power, who made it their busi-neſs to ſuppreſs them. Now in this caſe, they were put to this choice, if they would renounce or conceal the *Truth* of what they teſtified, they might preſently enjoy eaſe, and it may be, rewards too; but if they went on, they muſt look for nothing but the ſharpeſt perſecution; and this they met with almoſt in all places; and is it conceivable, that Men ſhould be ſo *fond* of a *lye*, to forſake all and follow it, and at laſt to take up their croſs for it? If *credit* and *intereſt* in the hearts of People, might carry a Man on a great way in the deluſion, yet he would be loth to dye for it; and yet there was never a one of the Apoſtles, but ventured his life for the *Truth* of this; and all but one, they tell us, did ſuffer Martyr-

Martyrdom for it. I pray, Sir, consider, where you ever meet with any thing like this, that so many Men should so resolutely dye, for what themselves at the same time knew to be a lye; and that they must certainly do, if it were all a contrivance of their own heads.

2. But although in these things they went as high as it was possible for *humane Testimony* to go, yet they had something beyond all this, which was a *concurrence* of a *Divine Testimony*, in the *miraculous gifts* and *operations* of the *Holy Ghost*. And this we assert to be the highest Testimony can be given in the World, of a *Truth* of any thing; because *God* will not employ his *Power* to deceive the World. And as all other *Truth* hath a *criterion* proper

to

to it; so this seems to be the proper *criterion* of a *Divine Testimony*, that it hath the *power of Miracles* going along with it. For if we do suppose God to make known his Mind to the World, it is very reasonable to believe there should be some *distinguishing note* of what is immediately from God, and what comes only from the *inventions* of *Men*; and what can be more proper to distinguish what comes from *God*, and what from *Men*, than to see those things done which none but *God* can do? But against this you object several things, which I shall easily and briefly Answer.

1. *You cannot tell what it is that Miracles do attest; not all their Doctrin, since* Paul *said, some was not from the Lord.* Answ. *Miracles* do attest the *veracity* of the *Speaker*,

Speaker, and by consequence the *truth* of the *Doctrin*; *not that you should believe that to be from the Lord, which he said was not*; but that which he said, was from the Lord. But when he makes such a distinction himself, it is very unreasonable to urge that as an Argument, that he had *nothing from the Lord*; it is much rather an argument of his candor and ingenuity, that he would not pretend to *Divine Revelation*, when he had it not.

2. *You would have it signified, what Doctrin it is which is attested by Miracles, since the Doctrins of Scripture lye in heaps and confusion.* *Answ.* To what purpose should any Doctrins be singled out to have the *Seal* of *Miracles* set to them, since it is their *Divine Commission* to Teach and declare the

the *Will* of *God*, which is *ſealed* by it? And what they did ſo Teach and declare, is eaſily known by their Writings.

3. *But why do not Miracles ſtill continue?* *Anſw.* Becauſe there are no Perſons employ'd to Teach any *new Doctrines*; and no Promiſe of *Scripture* doth imply any more: For the *ſigns* which were to follow them that believe, were ſuch as tended to the firſt confirmation of the *Chriſtian Faith*; which being effected, their uſe ceaſed; and ſo to ask why God doth not continue a Gift of *Miracles* to convince Men that the former were true, is to the ſame purpoſe as to ask why *God* doth not make a *New Sun*, to ſatisfie *Athieſts* that he made the *Old*?

4. *But doth not the Scripture ſay, that wonders are not always to be taken*

taken as confirmations of the Truth of Doctrin, since false Prophets may work Wonders, Deuteron. 13. 1. *Answ.* That signifies no more, than that *Wonders* are not to be believed against the Principles of *Natural Religion*; or Revealed *Religion* already confirmed by *greater Miracles*: And that those who would value such a particular *sign* above all the *series* of *Miracles* their *Religion* was first established by, may be justly left to their own *deluſions*. You might as well object the lying Wonders of the *Man of Sin*, against all the *Miracles* of *Christ* and his *Apoſtles*. If God hath once done enough to convince Men, he may afterwards justly leave them to the tryal of their Ingenuity; as a Father that hath used great care to make his Son understand

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true Coyn, may afterwards ſuffer *falſe* to be laid before him, to try whether he will mind his being cheated or no?

5. But you may yet farther demand, *what the Teſtimony of Miracles doth ſignifie to the Writings of the New Teſtament? Anſw.* 1. The Miracles do ſufficiently prove the *Authority* of that Doctrin, which was delivered by thoſe who wrought *Miracles*; as *Chriſt* and his *Apoſtles*. 2. If there had been the leaſt ground to queſtion the *Truth* and *Authority* of theſe *Writings*, they had never been ſo univerſally received in thoſe *Ages*, when ſo many were concerned to enquire into the *Truth* of theſe things; for we ſee ſeveral of the *Books* were a long time examined, and at laſt, when no ſufficient reaſon could

be

be brought against them, they were received by those *Churches*, which at first scrupled the receiving them: And I am so far from thinking the *doubts* of the first *Ages* any Argument against the *Authority* of a *Book*, that by the objections of some against some of them, I am thereby assured, that they did not presently receive any *Book*, because it went under the name of an *Apostolical Writing*: As I am the more confirmed in the belief of the *Resurrection* of *Christ*, because some of the *Disciples* were at first very *doubtful* about it.

6. You may yet ask, *What doth all this signifie to the Writings of the Old Testament, which were written at a longer distance of Time from us, and in a more Ignorant Age of of the World?* Answ. There can-

not be a *more* evident proof of the *Old Teſtament*, than by the *New*: For if the *New* be *true*, the *Old* muſt be ſo, which was confirmed ſo plainly and evidently by it; our *Saviour* and his *Apoſtles* appealing to *Moſes* and the *Prophets* on all occaſions. So that the ſame *Miracles* which prove their *Teſtimony* true, do at the ſame time prove the *Divine Authority* of the *Old Teſtament*, ſince it is ſo expreſly ſaid in the *New*, *That Holy Men of God did ſpeak as they were moved by the Holy Ghoſt.*

But after all this, You urge, that you have diſcover'd ſuch things in theſe Writings as could not come from God, as

1. *Contradictions in them.* 2. *Some things inconſiſtent with the Wiſdom of God.* 3. *Promiſes made that were never fulfilled.* 4. *Things ſo obſcure*

as no one can tell the meaning of them. Under these four Heads I shall examin the particular allegations you bring against the *Scriptures.*

1. Under the head of *Contradictions*, you insist on the *Prophecy* Gen. 15. 13, 14, 15, 16. *made to* Abraham *concerning his Posterity; compared with the Accomplishment mentioned*, Exod. 12. 40. 41. And the force of your Argument lyes in this, *That the Prophecy in* Genesis *doth imply that the Servitude of the Children of* Israel *in* Egypt *was to be* 40 *Years; or* 430 *saith* Exod. *but both these are repugnant to other places of Scripture, which make their abode in* Egypt *not to exceed* 215 *Years; or at the highest, by the number of Generations could not exceed* 350 *Years, stretching them to the utmost advantage.* To this which you lay so much

weight upon, I Answer distinctly,

1. By your own confession, supposing the 430 Years to begin from the *Covenant* made with *Abraham*, the accomplishment mentioned, *Exod.* 12. 40. doth fall out exactly in the time of the *Children* of *Israels* going out of *Egypt*, for you have proved from *Scripture*, that from the *Covenant* with *Abraham* to *Jacobs* being in *Egypt*, were 215 Years; to which you add, *that* Coath *being supposed* 5 *Years Old at the going into* Egypt; *and that at* 70 *Years he Begat* Amram, *and that* Amram *at at* 70 *Begat* Moses, *to which* Moses *his* 80 *Years being added, makes up the other* 215 *Years, whereby we have the full* 430 *Years, by your own computation.* Now, Sir, I pray consider what reason you have

to

to charge the *Scripture* with contradiction in a Matter your self acknowledges, so exactly accomplished in this way of *computation*?

2. But you say, *the Words will not bear this; because they speak of the* 400 *Years to expire in their Servitude in* Egypt. Answ. For this we must consider the importance of the Words both in *Genesis* and *Exodus*. There is not a Word of *Egypt* mentioned in *Genesis*; but only in general it is said, *Thy Seed shall be a Stranger in the Land that is not theirs, and shall serve them, and they shall afflict them* 400 *Years*; and it will conduce very much to the right understanding this *Prophecy* to consider the main scope and design of it, which was not to tell *Abraham* how long they should be in *servitude* to the *Egyp-*

tians, but how long it would be before his Seed ſhould come to the *poſſeſſion* of the promiſed *Land*; And it ſeems *Abraham* by the *Queſtion*, Gen. 15. 7. 8. did expect to have the Inheritance of this Land *in his own time*: To this therefore *God* Anſwers, by telling him, he meant no ſuch thing, but it was intended for *his Seed*, and that not ſuddenly neither, for they were to tarry *till the iniquity of the* Amorites *ſhould be full*, which would not be till the *fourth Generation*; and then *his Seed ſhould after* 400 *Years*, *come to the Poſſeſſion of the Promiſed Land*; *but in the mean time they were to Sojourn in a Land that was not theirs*, *and to meet with many hardſhips and difficulties*. This is plainly the ſcope of this *prophecy*, and by attending to it, the great Objections preſently

preſently appear without force; for the *Land* of *Canaan* notwithſtanding the Promiſe, was by the *Patriarchs* themſelves looked on as a *Land* wherein they were *Strangers*. So *Abraham* ſaith *Gen.* 23. 4. *I am a Stranger and a Sojourner with you*; and which is more remarkable in the bleſſing of *Jacob* by *Iſaac*, to whom the *Promiſe* was made, it is ſaid; *And give thee the Bleſſing of* Abraham *to thee, and to thy Seed, that thou mayeſt inherit the Land wherein thou art a Stranger, which God gave unto* Abraham, *Gen.* 28. 4. Where the very ſame Word is uſed concerning *Jacob*, that is expreſſed in the Prophecy, *Gen.* 15. 13. So that the *Patriarchs* looked on themſelves as *Strangers in the Land of* Canaan, ſo long after the *promiſe* made, and after

the *increaſe* of the *Seed* of *Abraham*: And therefore the *land* of *Canaan* was called *Terra Peregrinationum*, the *Land* wherein they were *ſtrangers*; Gen. 36. 7. -- 37. 1. And when *God* was calling the People of *Iſrael* together out of *Egypt*, yet then the *Land* of *Canaan* was called by the very ſame title, the *Land of their Pilgrimage, wherein they were ſtrangers*: *Exod.* 6. 4. And *Pſ.* 105. 9, 10, 11, 12, 13. where we have a full account of the *Promiſe* made to *Abraham*, *Iſaac*, and *Jacob*, concerning the *inheritance* of that *Land* it is ſaid, *that they were few, and ſtrangers in it, when they went from one Nation to another, from one Kingdom to another People.* Which doth fully explain the meaning of the *Prophecy* in *Geneſis*, and that it is not to be reſtrained to the *ſervi-*

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tude of the *People* of *Israel* in *Egypt*, but to be understood of their *state* of *Pilgrimage* for 400 Years, wherein they were to suffer great hardships, before they should come to the Inheritance of *Canaan*. *This is no forced or unnatural exposition of the Words*, as you seem to suggest; but to my apprehension, very plain and easie, if we attend to the main scope and design of them which was to acquaint *Abraham* how long it would be before the *prophecy* were accomplished, and what the condition of his Seed should be the mean time, *viz. That they should have no Land which they should call their own by Inheritance all that time, but they should be exposed to great hardships, yea even to Servitude; but that Nation whom they should serve, should at last suffer for*

their ill usage of them, and they should come out of that Captivity with great substance; and all this to be done in the fourth Generation of the Amorites *when their Iniquities should be arrived at the full height.* All which particulars, were so remarkably accomplished at such a distance of time, and under such improbable circumstances, that that this very *prophecy* were enough to convince an unprejudiced mind, that it came from Divine Inspiration. For where do we meet with any thing like this in the Histories of other Nations? *viz.* A Prophecy to be accomplished 400 Years after, and the very manner foretold, which no humane conjecture could reach to, since the manner of deliverance of the *People* of *Israel* out of their Captivity in *Egypt*,

Egypt, was to all humane appearance so impossible a thing, especially at such a time when the *Spirits* of the People were sunk and broken by so long a slavery: And not only the manner foretold, but the accomplishment happened to a day, according to *Exodus* 12. 41. *And it came to pass at the end of the* 430 *Years, even the selfe-same day it came to pass, that all the Hosts of the Lord went out from the Land of* Egypt. But against this you object, *That the sojourning is spoken of the Children of* Israel *in* Egypt *for* 430 *Years; which cannot hold good any ways; since, to make it up, the times of* Abraham, Isaac, *and* Jacob, *must be taken in who could not be called the Children of* Israel. *Answ.* For the 430 Years, I grant, that according to St. *Paul*, they

they did commence from the *Covenant* made to *Abraham* Gal. 3. 17. and that the 400 Years began from *Isaac*'s being owned for the *Promised Seed*; between which time the 30 Years were passed; and all appearance of difficulty is avoided, if we admit the reading of the best Copies of the *LXX.* which is in these words, Ἡ δὲ παροίκησις τῶν υἱῶν Ἰσραὴλ, ἣν παῴκησαν ἐν γῇ Αἰγύπτῳ, καὶ ἐν γῇ Χαναάν, αὐτοὶ καὶ οἱ πατέρες αὐτῶν ἔτη τετρακόσια τριάκοντα, *Now the sojourning of the Children of* Israel *who dwelt in* Egypt *and* Canaan, *they and their Fathers was* 430 *Years.* This is the reading of our *Alexandrian* Copy, and the *Complutensian*, and that of *Aldus*, and of *Eusebius* in his *Chronicon*, and of St. *Hierome* in his Translation of it; and

and of the *Church* in St. *Augustins* time, and afterwards; and lest any should reject this as a late Interpolation, or glos received into the Text, besides these Testimonies of the Antiquity of it, we find the very same in the *Samaritan* Copy, which the Enemies of it do allow to be as ancient as our *Saviours* time. And that which very much confirms the Truth of this reading is, that the *Jews* themselves follow the sense of it, who are the most eager contenders for the *Authority* of the *Hebrew* Copy; who all agree, that the beginning of the Computation of the 430 Years is to be taken before the *Children* of *Israels* going into *Egypt*: and *Menasseh Ben Israel* contends with many others, that the 430 Years did begin from the

the *Promise* made to *Abraham*, and the 400 from the time of *Isaac*, to which their most ancient *Books* of *Chronology* do agree, and to the same purpose speak both *Philo Judæus*, and *Josephus*; who although in one place he seems to make *the* Israelites *affliction in* Egypt *to have been* 400 *Years*, yet when he speaks more particularly of it, *he makes the time of their abode in* Egypt *to have been only* 215, *and the* 430 *to begin from* Abrahams *entrance into* Canaan: The *Targum* of *Jonathan* begins the 430 from the Vision of *Abraham*, and the 400 from the Birth of *Isaac*; all which I mention, to let you see that the *Jews* themselves do in sense concur with the *Samaritan* and *Greek* Copy; and therefore we have more reason to suspect some-

ſomething left out in the preſent *Hebrew*, than any thing added in thoſe Copies. *But doth not this take off from the Authority of the Scripture?* Not at all: For the only Queſtion is about the True Reading: And having the conſent of the *Samaritan*, *Alexandrian*, and other Copies of the *LXX.* and of the Ancient *Church*; and of the *Jews* themſelves as to the ſenſe of it, we have reaſon to look on this as the truer Reading: Which is making no addition to the *ſcripture* either as to Perſons or Places, but only producing the more Authentick Copy; much leſs is this Adding or Changing as we pleaſe, for if we did this without ſo much Authority as we have for it, you might as eaſily reject it as we produce it.

3. After

3. After all this, I do not ſee the mighty force of your Reaſon to charge the Scripture with Contradiction, ſuppoſing *the* 400 *Years were to be ſpent in the ſervitude of the Children of* Iſrael *in* Egypt. I confeſs, when I found the *Scripture* ſo boldly, ſo frequently charged with no leſs than Contradiction, I expected ſomething like Demonſtration in the Caſe, eſpecially in this place which you choſe to put in the Front of all; but I do not find any thing like ſuch a proof of a Contradiction, ſuppoſing we ſhould allow the 400 Years to be ſpent in *Egypt*. Yes, ſay you, Coath *was* 5 *Years Old when he came down into* Egypt, *and When he had lived there* 65 *Years he begat* Amram, *and* Amram *being* 70 *Years Old begat* Moſes, *to which* Moſes *his* 80 *Years being added*,

added, we have only 215 Years. But since the *Scripture* doth not assign, the particular Age of any of these, when they begat their Children, I see no impossibility or repugnancy in the supposition, that 400 Years should pass from *Levi's* going into *Egypt*, to the Eightieth of *Moses*, any more than from *Salmons* entrance into *Canaan* to the *time* of *David*, for no more are reckoned in *scripture* than *Boaz* the Son of *Salmon*, by *Raab*, and *Obed*, and *Jesse*; So that by the same way, this latter may be explained, the former may be so too. If it be said, *That either they begat their Children at a great Age, or that the scripture in Genealogies doth not set down all the intermediate Parents, but only the most eminent, (as* Caleb *is called the Son of* Esron.

1 Chron. 2. 9, 18. *although there was at least one between them*,) the very same Answer will serve to clear this part of the *Chronology* of *Scripture* from any appearance of Contradiction. These things you might have found more largely deduced and fully handled by those Learned Persons, who have undertaken to clear the *Chronology* of *Scripture*: Who were men of more Judgment, than from any difficulty of this nature, to call in question the *Truth* and *Authority* of the *Sacred Scriptures*; and although the Opinions of *Chronologers*, are like the City Clocks, which seldom agree, yet some come nearer the time of the day than others do; and therefore you ought to examine and compare them before you pronounce so peremptorily about

about Contradictions in *ſcripture*, which you have no reaſon to do till you find that no one *hypotheſis* among them will ſerve to free the *ſcripture* from Contradiction: For otherwiſe, you do but blame the *Sun*, becauſe you cannot make the Clocks agree.

This is all I can find in your Papers under the *head* of Contradictions; and I leave you now ſoberly to conſider, whether this place did afford you ſufficient ground for ſo heavy a Charge; but if you ſay, *you have a great many more by you, but you ſent me this only for a Tryal of my skill*; before you ſend any more; I beſeech you, Sir, to conſider,

1. How eaſily things do appear to be Contradictions to weak, or unſtudied, or prejudiced minds, which after due

consideration appear to be no such things. A deep prejudice finds a Contradiction in every thing; whereas in *Truth*, nothing but ill will, and impatience of considering, made any thing, it may be, which they Quarrel at, appear to be so. If I had been of such a quarrelsome humour, I would have undertaken to have found out more Contradictions in your Papers, than you imagin, and yet you might have been confident, you had been guilty of none at all. When I consider the great pains, and Learning, and Judgement, which hath been shewn by the *Christian Writers* in the Explication of the *Scriptures*; and the raw, indigested Objections which some love to make against them, if I were to judge of things barely by

by the fitneſs of perſons to judge of them, the diſproportion between theſe, would appear out of all compariſon. A modeſt Man would in any thing of this nature ſay with himſelf, methinks, if there were ſuch Contradictions in the *Bible*, as now ſeem to me; ſo many perſons of incomparable Abilities in the Firſt, and latter Ages of the *Chriſtian* Church, who have made it their buſineſs to enquire into theſe things, would have diſcerned them before me: And yet they retained a mighty veneration for the *ſcriptures*, as coming from God himſelf; and therefore it may be only weakneſs of Judgement, want of Learning, or ſome ſecret prejudice may make me ſuſpect theſe things; or elſe I muſt ſuſpect the honeſty of

all those persons who have pretended such a Devotion to the Scriptures, and yet have believed them full of Contradictions.

2. *Wherein* the Contradiction appears. Is it in the main and weighty parts of the *Religion* revealed herein; or is it only in some smaller Circumstances as to time and place? The great thing you are to look after, are the Matters those *Scriptures* tell you your Salvation depends upon; and if there be a full consent, and agreement therein; you find enough for you to believe and practice. And if some Contradictions should still appear to you in smaller Matters, what follows from thence, but only that the same care was not taken about little, as about great things? And you ought to set that appearance

rance of Contradiction in ſmall Matters, together with the real conſent in the things of the higheſt importance; and from thence rather to infer, that this was no combination or deſign to deceive others; for ſuch perſons take the greateſt care to prevent ſuſpicion, by their exactneſs in every minute Circumſtance; and ſometimes the over-much care to prevent ſuſpicion doth raiſe it the more.

3. *What ways* have been uſed by Men of judgement and learning, to clear thoſe places from the charge of Contradiction. For, not one of the Objections you can ſtart now, but hath been conſidered over and over; and all the difficulties that belong to it examined; If you will not take the pains to do this; it is plain you do not deſire ſatisfacti-

on, but only ſeek for a pretence to cavil; eſpecially, if you only ſearch the weakeſt or moſt injudicious Writers on the Scriptures, and endeavour to expoſe their opinions, without taking notice of what others have ſaid with more clear and evident Reaſon. This ſhews either want of Judgment in chooſing ſuch Expoſitors, or want of Candor and fair dealing and a deſire of taking any advantage againſt the Scriptures.

4. How hard a Matter it is for us at this diſtance to underſtand exactly the grounds of *Chronology*, or the manner of computation of Times uſed ſo long ago: and therefore in all difficulties of this nature, we ought to make the faireſt allowances that may be, conſidering with-

withall, that escapes and errours are no where more easily committed by Transcribers, than in *numbers*: and that it is a very unreasonable thing, that a *Book* otherwise deserving to be thought the best *Book* in the World, should be scorned and rejected, because there appears some difference in the *computation* of *times*. We do not so exactly know the manner of the *Hebrew Chronology*, nor, the nature of their Year, or Intercalations, nor the customs of their *Genealogies*; nor the allowance to be made for *interregnums*, so as to be able to define peremptorily in these things; but it is sufficient to shew, that there is no improbability in the accounts that are given; and no sufficient reason can be drawn from thence to

reject

reject the Authority of the *Scriptures.*

2. I come to consider the places you object, *as containing things inconsistent with the Wisdom, or Goodness of God, according to a rational perswasion*; and those are either, 1. *From the Laws of* Moses. 2. *From the express story of the Bible, or actions of the Prophets.*

1. *From the Laws of* Moses: Your *first Objection* is from *Exod.* 21. 7. *Where a Man is supposed to sell his Daughter; which you say, it is incredible to believe that God should permit; because it implies unnatural affection and covetousness in the Father.* But, Sir, 1. You do not consider, that this is barely a *provisional Law*, and is not the *permission* of the thing, so much as the *regulation* of it, supposing it

it to be done, *i. e.* in caſe a Man ſhould part with his intereſt in his Daughter to another Perſon, upon an extraordinary caſe of neceſſity, as the *Jews* underſtand it; yet then, ſhe was not to be in the condition of a Servant, but to be either Betrothed to the Perſon who receiv'd her, or to his Son; which was intended for the reſtraint of promiſcuous Buying and Selling Daughters, meerly for the ſatisfaction of Luſt. The *Jews* who certainly beſt underſtood their own Judicial *Laws*, do ſay, that this was never to be done, but where there was a preſumption of ſuch a *betrothing*; for no Man could Sell his Daughter to thoſe to whom it was unlawful for her to *Marry* by their *Law*; ſo that this was looked on as a kind of *Eſpouſals* of a young Girle,

Girle, taken into Wardship by another; but so, that if she were not Betrothed, she was to remain her 6 Years during her Minority, as the *Jews* understand it; unless she were redeemed, or set Free, or the *Jubile* came, or the Master dyed, or the time of her Minority expired.

2. The case of *necessity* being supposed, it hath been thought lawful for *Parents* to make advantage by their *Children*, not only by the *Jews*, but by other Nations, who have been in the greatest esteem for Wisdom. For by the *Law* of the 12 *Tables*, among the *Romans*, the *Father* had the liberty of Selling his Son three times, for his own advantage, as *Dionys. Halicarnasseus* relates; and before that time, it was not only in use among the

the *Romans*, but in such esteem among them, that upon the review of their Laws the *Decemviri* durst not leave it out; but by one of the *Laws* of *Numa Pompilius*, it was restrained to the times before Marriage, for in case the *Son* had the *Fathers* consent to Marry, he could not Sell him afterwards, as the same *Author* tells us. This *Law* continued in force among them, till *Christianity* prevailed in the *Roman Empire*, for although there were a prohibition of *Diocletian* against it, yet that signified nothing, till *Constantine* took care, *That such indigent Parents should be relieved out of the publick charge*, Cod. Theodos. l. 11. tit. 27. 2. And yet after this, the Custom did continue, when the *Parents* were in great want, as appears by a

Law

Law of *Theodosius*, Cod. 3. tit. 3. *Omnes quos Parentum miseranda fortuna in servitium dum victum requirunt addixit, ingenuitati pristinæ reformentur.* And it further appears, that even in *Constantin's* time, notwithstanding the Law made by him, *Parents* would still, when they thought themselves overcharged with Children, part with their Interest in them to others for advantage, but it was chiefly while they were *sanguinolenti*, as the Law expresses it, *i. e. new Born. Cod. Theod. l. 5. tit.* 8. By the Laws of *Athens*, before *Solons* time, Parents might sell their Children, as appears by *Plutarch*, in his Life; and the same *Philostratus* reports of the *Phrygians*, *l.* 3. *vit. Apollon. Tyan.* and the like custom doth obtain among the *Chineses* to this day

day, if persons do think themselves unable to bring up their *Children* themselves. And there are two things to be said for it. 1. The natural obligation lying on Children to provide for their Parents in necessity, by any way they are able. 2. The probability of better Education under more able Persons; and therefore the *Thebans* had a Law, *That* Parents *in case of poverty, were to bring their* Children *to the Magistrate, as soon as they were Born, who put them out to such as were judged fit to bring them up, and to have their service for their reward.* *Ælian. v. hist. l. 2. c. 7.*

But however, you say, *This place implys a toleration of having many Wives, because it is said, if he take him another Wife, v.* 10. I do not deny, that the *Mosaical* Law did suppose the practice of

Poly-

Polygamy; but as it doth no where expreſsly allow it, neither doth it expreſsly condemn it. And although we ſay, the *Chriſtian Law* is far more excellent, which reduceth Marriage to its firſt inſtitution; yet you will find it a hard Matter to prove ſuch a permiſſion of *Polygamy* as this was, to be ſo repugnant to the *Law* and Principles of *Nature*, as from thence to infer, that this *Law* of *Moſes* could not be from *God*: You might have ſaid the ſame about the Matter of *Divorce*, which was permitted them; *Chriſt* ſaith, *for the hardneſs of their hearts*: Which ſhews, that *God* doth not always require that from Men which is beſt pleaſing to himſelf; and that as to his *Political Government*, he may not always puniſh that, which is not ſo pleaſing to him. The

The next Law you quarrel at is that, *Deut.* 22. 13, &c. *About the tryal of Virginity*: Which you object against, *as immodest, and uncertain, and therefore unbecoming the Wisdom of God.* So, many customs of those elder times of the World, and of the *Eastern* parts to this day seem very strange to us, that are not so well acquainted with the *Reasons* of them. Methinks, it better becomes our *Modesty* in such cases, to question our understanding those customes, than presently to cast so much disparagement on the Author of them. If you had been offended at the literal sense of those Words, many of the *Jews* themselves say, they are to be understood figuratively of the evidence that was to be brought and laid open

before the *Judges*, on behalf of the defamed Person. And both *Josephus* and *Philo* omit the laying open the Cloth. But supposing it to be taken in the plainest literal sense, I have Two Things to say in vindication of this Law. 1. That however uncertain some *Physitians* have thought that way of Tryal to have been in these parts of the World; yet it is generally agreed to have held for the *Eastern* parts, by the most skilful *Physitians* among the *Arabians*: And a custom of the same nature is said by good Authors to have been observed among the *Egyptians*, and other *Africans*, as well as the *Arabians*; so that this could not be thought so strange or immodest among the Inhabitants of those parts: And it is very probable that some par-

particulars, as to the Practice of these *Laws* are not set down, which might very much tend to the certainty of them, as the Age of the Married Persons, which was most likely then, as it is to this day in the *Eastern* parts, very early, the *Jews* say, at 12 years old, which would make the Tryal more certain. 2. As to the Modesty of it, you are to consider, that the *Law* was intended to keep persons from unjust *defamations*, and such a way of *Tryal* was therefore pitched upon to deter persons from such defamations; which Men might otherwise have been more ready to, because of the *liberty* of *divorce*, and the advantage they had in saving the *dower*, if they could prove the party vitiated before Marriage; therefore all the proof

of that Nature was to be passed soon after the consummation of Marriage, which being agreed then by all the Friends, there was to be no liberty left for defamation afterwards; but in case any Man should be guilty of it, the producing those Evidences, which before they were agreed upon, should be sufficient to clear the Innocency of the party accused. And therefore I look on this *Law*, as the *Jews* do on that of the *rebellious Son*, of which they say, that there is no instance of the practice of it; the Penalty threatned being so effectual to prevent the occasion of it.

And such in a great Measure, I suppose the other *Law* mentioned by you to have been, *viz. of the Water of Jealousy*, which you make so strange a matter of;

and

and think it *savours too much of a design to gratify the jealous humour of the Jewish Nation*: But you might have put a fairer construction upon it, *viz.* That it was intended to prevent any occasion of suspicion being given to the Husband, by too much familiarity with other persons; since the Law allowed so severe a Trial, in Case the Wife after admonition did not forbear such suspected familiarity, but if you had looked on the Law, as it is, Num. 5. 12, 13. *&c.* you would have found, that the design of it was to keep Women from committing *secret Adultery*, by so severe a Penalty; yet withall allowing so much to a reasonable suspicion, (for so the *Jews* understand it, with many Cautions and Limitations) that rather

then Married perſons ſhould live under perpetual jealouſies, he appointed this extraordinary way of Tryal, whereby Adultery was moſt ſeverely puniſhed, and the honour of Innocency publickly vindicated; which certainly are not ends at all unbecoming due Conceptions of God.

The laſt of the *Jewiſh Laws*, which you quarrel with is *the prohibition of Uſury, in ſeveral places of Moſes his Law and the Pſalms*: And from hence you fall into a long Diſcourſe *to prove the lawfulneſs of Uſury*: But to what purpoſe I beſeech you? For you were to prove, that *God* could never forbid it; you might have ſpared *your pity for Men*, as you think, *Blinded with ſuperſtition, and cheated with New and Aëry Notions*: For by all that I can ſee by theſe Papers,

Papers, some pretended Enemies to *superstition* have no better Eyes than their Neighbours, and are as easily cheated with groundless Fancies and Aëry imaginations. The only thing to the business in that long Discourse is this, *That you cannot imagine that God should make a Law so much to Mans inconvenience, and forbid him so nice and indifferent a thing, as Moderate increase of profit by letting out of Money, when it is allowed upon Lands, Houses, and Trade,* &c. To this I Answer, that the prohibition of *Usury*, to the *Jewish Nation*, was upon *political Grounds* peculiar to the constitution of that *People*; as appears by the words of the Law, *Deut.* 23. 19, 20. *Thou shalt not lend to Usury unto thy Brother ---- Unto a Stranger thou maist lend upon Usury*; but

none of the *Laws* which are founded upon common and Moral Reasons have such Limitations as this; for God would never have said, *Thou shalt not commit Adultery with thy Brothers Wife*; but *with the Wife of a Stranger thou maist.* But there was this particular Reason, for the prohibition of *Usury* to the *Jewish Nation*: It pleased God to fix their Habitation, not upon the Sea-side, as *Tyre* and *Sidon* stood; but within Land where they had no conveniencies of Trading, but the Riches of the *Nation* lay in *Agriculture* and *Pasturage*: In which the Returns of Money are neither so quick nor so advantageous to make sufficient compensation for the Interest of the Money in the time they have it: For the main thing valuable in Money is the

the advantage the borrower makes of it; and where that is great, it seems reasonable that the person whose the Money is, should have a proportionable share of the advantage made by it; but where persons borrow only for present occasions to supply their necessities, there it is only an Act of kindness to lend, and it would be unreasonable to press upon, or take advantage by anothers necessities. And this seems to have been the case among the *Jews*; they were only the Poor that wanted Money for present necessities; the Rich had no way to imploy it in Trading, unless that they lent to the *Tyrian Merchants*, which it was lawful by their Law to do; now if they took *Usury* of their own people, it must be of those whose urgent necessity, and not hopes of a mighty

mighty increaſe by it made them borrow, and therefore it was a very juſt and reaſonable *Law* to forbid *Uſury* among them: which I believe he would never have done, if he had placed the *Jews* upon the Coaſts of *Phœnicia*, where Trading was ſo much in requeſt.

Theſe are all the *Laws* which you have picked out of the *whole* Body of the *Jewiſh Law*, to repreſent it unbecoming the *Wiſdom* of *God*: And now I pray Sir, look back again upon them, ſee how few, how ſmall, how weak your Objections are; and compare them with the *weight*, and *juſtice*, and *prudence*, and *piety*, expreſſed in all the reſt, and I hope you will find cauſe to be aſhamed of ſpeaking ſo harſhly of thoſe *Laws*, ſo well acco-

accommodated to those Ages of the World, and the Condition of that *People* for whom they were appointed.

2. I now consider what you object against the *story* of the *Bible*.

1. *That passage of* Moses, Exod. 32. 32. *Blot me out of thy Book which thou hast written*: Where your design is to shew *that* Moses *prayed to be Damned, and that this was a very irrational thing*: *And savouring more of passion than of the Spirit of God.* But what if *Moses* meant no such thing as Damnation? As there is not any word in the Context relating that ways, but all the design of that Chapter is about a Temporal punishment, which was a present Destruction of the People for their sins. And the Book out of which he prayed

God

God to blot him, seems to me to be no other, than the Roll of *Gods chosen people, who were to possess the Land of* Canaan: For so ספר properly signifies a *Roll* or *Register*. *Psalm* 69. 28. We meet with ספר חיים *the Roll of the living, or the Book of the living* we render it, because all ancient *Books* were in the fashion of *Rolls*. In that Chapter, *Moses* intercedes with *God* on behalf of the People, that he would make good his promise to them, of bringing them into the *Land of* Canaan. *v.* 13. and *v.* 30. He goes up to make an Atonement for the People, i. e. *as to the cutting them off in the Wilderness*, and therefore he desires rather than the People should be destroy'd, *that God would strike him out of the Roll, that he might Dye in the*

the Wilderness rather than the People: And God gives that Answer to this purpose, v. 33. *Whoever hath sinned against me, will I blot out of my Book*, the sense of which is the same with those words of the *Psalmist*, *he sware in his wrath that they should not enter into his Rest. Psal.* 95, 11. And according to this interpretation, which is most natural and easie, all your long Discourse *against praying to be Damned* comes to just nothing; there being no pretence for it, either in the Text or Context.

2. The *story* of *Ruth* doth not please you, *as savouring in your opinion of a great deal of Immodesty*; but you would have a better opinion of it, if you consider that the reason of her carriage towards *Boaz*, in such a manner, was upon *Naomies* telling her *that he*

he was one to whom the right of redemption did belong, and by consequence, by their Law, *was to Marry her.* *Ruth* 2. 20. And this *Ruth* pleaded to *Boaz*, *Ruth* 3. 9. By which it appears, that she verily believed that he was *legally* her Husband; and *Boaz* we see speaks of her *as one that was a vertuous Woman, and known to be such in the whole City.* v. 11. And he confesses *he was her near kinsman*, *only* he saith, *there was one nearer.* v. 12. By which it seems, if there had not, *Boaz* had made no Scruple of the matter: And the *Jews* say, in such Marriages very little *Ceremony* was required, if the next of *kin* did not renounce his right, because the *Law* had determined the *Marriage* before hand. If you had but considered this one thing,

thing, you would have ſpared the many *Obſervations* you make on this ſtory.

3. You Object againſt 2 *Sam.* 12. 8. *as too much countenancing either Inceſt or Adultery, becauſe it is ſaid, that God gave to* David *his Maſters Wives into his Boſom.* But 1. It is very ſtrange to bring this place as a countenance to *Adultery*, which was purpoſely deſigned to upbraid *David* with the ſin of *Adultery*; and you will find it no eaſie matter, by the conſtitution of the *Moſaical Law*, to prove *Polygamy* to be *Adultery*. 2. The *Jews* give a fair Interpretation of this place, for they ſay, that the *Wife* of a *King* could never *Marry* after her Husbands deceaſe, as the *Gemara* on the Title *Sanhedrim* expreſly ſaith, although ſome among them

them follow the opinion of *R. Jehuda*, that she might Marry the succeeding *King*; but that is built chiefly on this place; of which the rest give a better account, *viz.* that נשים doth not imply *Sauls Wives*, but the *Maids of Honour*, or *Attendants*, on the *Court* of *Saul*, which all fell into *Davids* power, and out of whom he might choose *Wives*, without danger of *Incest*; and even some of those who assert it lawful for one *King* to Marry his predecessors Wife, yet say in this case of *David*, that the Word only implies, that they were of *Saul's Family*, as *Merab* and *Michal* were, but not *Saul's Wives*. So that all the difficulty here arises only from the Interpretation of an *unusual word*, in which we have much more reason to trust the

Selden. vxor Ebra. l.1.c.10. *Schick. De jure Reg.* c. 16. Theor. 19.

the *Jews* than other Writers.

4. You are much offended *at Hoſea's Marrying an Adultereſs*: But all the formidable difficulties of that place will preſently vaniſh, if you allow the *Prophetical Schemes*, wherein thoſe things are ſaid to be done, which are intended only to repreſent in a more lively manner the things ſignified by them. And ſo you may ſee the *Chaldee Paraphraſe*, fully explains this place of *Hoſea* and *Maimonides* purpoſely diſcourſeth on the *Prophetick parables*, and brings this as one of the inſtances of them; and with him the reſt of the *Jewiſh Interpreters* agree: But you Object againſt ſuch a way of Teaching, *as tending to the encouragement of Vice*, which it is very far from, being deſigned to repreſent the odiouſneſs of it:

Maim. More Nevoch. l. 2. c. 46.

For the whole Scope of the *Prophet* is to let the People understand, that their *Idolatry* was as hateful to *God* as the sin of *Adultery*, and that the consequence of it would be their Misery and Ruine. And yet that *God* expressed as much tenderness to them, as a Man that was very fond of a Woman would do, in being unwilling to put her away, although he knew she were false to his Bed: the former is intended in the first *Chapter*, and the latter in the third. And what is there tending to Immorality in all this? May not *God* make use of one Vice, whose evil is more notorious to represent another by, whose evil they are more hardly convinced of? May not he set forth a *Degenerate People* by the *Sons* of an *Adulteress*? And by the Names given

given to them expreſs his deteſtation of their wickedneſs? Eſpecially when the *Parabolical* Terms are ſo clearly explained, as they are in the ſecond Chapter.

But you will ſay, *theſe things are related as plain matters of Fact: with the ſeveral circumſtances belonging to them.* It is true, they are ſo, but ſo Parables uſe to be; ſo was *Nathan's* to *David*; ſo is that of the Rich Man and *Lazarus* in the *New Teſtament*; ſo is *Jeremies* going to *Euphrates to hide his Girdle*; (for it is not very likely the *Prophet* ſhould be ſent 18 or 20 days Journey into an Enemies Country for no other end:) So is *Ezekiels lying on one ſide for* 390 *days, and having his Head and Beard* contrary to the Law, as *Maimonides* obſerves: And his

Jer. 13. 4. 5.

Ezek. 4. 5. 6.

Ezek. 5. 1.

Ezek. 8. 8. *digging in the Walls of the Temple at* Hieruſalem, while he was in *Babylon*: And many other things of a like nature, which are ſet forth with as punctual a Narration of circumſtances as this of *Hoſea*, and yet they were only figurative expreſſions. We that are accuſtomed to another way of Learning, think theſe things ſtrange; but this was a very common way in the *elder* times, and it is to this day much uſed in the *Eaſtern Countries*, to repreſent *Duties* to ſome, under the *Parables* of things as really done by others: As may be ſeen in *Locman* and *Perzoes*, beſides what *Clemens Alexandrinus* and others have ſaid, concerning the *Antiquity* and common uſe of this *Parabolical* way of Teaching.

I now come to your Objecti-

ons

ons against the *New Testament*: but I find them so few, and those so slight and inconsiderable, as to the end for which you produce them, that I may easily pass them over. To that *about the continuance of Miracles*, I have already Answer'd: And I find not one word in the places mentioned by you, which implies the necessity of the continuance of them in all Ages of the *Christian Church*. That place, *Mark* 10. 29, 30. speaks of no more but such a *recompence* in this life *as is consistent with persecution*; and therefore must chiefly lie in inward contentment; which all wise Men have valued above external accommodations; although withall, by the account St. *Paul* gives of himself, and his Brethren,

thren, God did abundantly provide for them one way or other.

2 Cor. 6. 10. *As having nothing, and yet enjoying all things*: Which amounts to a Hundred-fold in this life.

But certainly you are the firſt Man, Who have Objected *the obſcurity of the Book of Revelations, againſt the Authority of the Scriptures*: Which is juſt as if one ſhould Object the *quadrature* of the *Circle* againſt *Mathematical certainty*. If we grant that there are ſome things in that *Myſtical Book*, we do not yet well underſtand; what then! Muſt neither that *Book*, nor any other of the *Bible* be of *Divine Revelation*? I will not purſue the unreaſonableneſs of this way of arguing ſo far as I might; but I leave your ſelf to conſider of it; and of

all

all that I have Written, in order to your *satisfaction*. If you think fit to return an Answer, I pray do it clearly and shortly, and with that freedom from Passion, which becomes so weighty a Matter: And I beseech *God* to give you a right understanding in all things. I am

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